Amendments to the Claims:

1-21. (Canceled)

22. (Currently Amended) A method for evaluating whether a sample contains HBV that may have escaped immunological detection of HBV surface antigen (HBsAg), said method comprising the steps of:

i) mixing the sample with a set of first and second primers having SEQ ID NO: 1 and SEQ ID NO: 2, respectively;

ii) performing PCR on the mixture generated in step i) to generate an amplified primer extension product;

iii) determining whether the amplified product comprises nucleic acid encoding major HBV surface antigen (SHBsAg) having a mutation at amino acid ~~position~~ positions 130, 131, 133 ~~or~~ and 145~~, or having mutations at amino acid positions 130 and 145, 130 and 133, 131 and 145, or 133 and 145~~; and

iv) identifying said mutation indicating that the sample contains HBV that may have escaped immunological detection of HBsAg.

23. (Canceled)

24. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 22 wherein the mutation at position 130 is from glycine to aspartic acid.

25. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 22 wherein the mutation at position 131 is from threonine to asparagine.

26. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 22 wherein the mutation at position 133 is from methionine to threonine.

27. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 22 wherein the mutation at position 145 is from glycine to arginine.

28. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 22 wherein the mutations at positions 130 and 145 are from glycine to aspartic acid at position 130, and from glycine to arginine at position 145.

29. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 22 wherein the mutations at positions 130 and 133 are from glycine to aspartic acid at position 130, and from methionine to threonine at position 133.

30. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 22 wherein the mutations at positions 131 and 145 are from threonine to asparagine at position 131, and from glycine to arginine at position 145.

31. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 22 wherein the mutations at positions 130 and 145 are from methionine to threonine at position 133, and from glycine to arginine at position 145.

32-42. (Canceled)

43. (New) A method according to Claim 22, further comprising:

first subjecting the sample to reverse transcription conditions to yield single or double stranded cDNA molecules from HBV-derived mRNA.

44. (New) A method according to Claim 22 wherein the first primer is labeled with a reporter molecule capable of giving an identifiable signal and the second primer is labeled with a capturable moiety, or the first primer is labeled with a capturable moiety and the second primer is labeled with a reporter molecule capable of giving an identifiable signal.

45. (New) A method according to claim 44 wherein the primer labeled with a capturable moiety is immobilized to a solid support.

46. (New) A method according to Claim 44 wherein the capturable moiety is biotin and the reporter molecule is fluorescein or Texas Red.